Society should be so ordered that the fortunately placed in life come to the assistance of their less fortunate brothers, in the knowledge that they will ultimately be rewarded by God. Believers nave the assurance of God that if they give to others, whatever they give will be returned to them many times over in the next world; their trust in God's promise is complete. In a society ordered in this way, feelings of antagonism and indifference are not allowed to develop: people are not bent on exploiting one another. There is never an atmosphere of mutual resentment and dissatisfaction, for everyone lives in peace with his neighbour. Such a society, in short, is a haven of contentment and well-being.

Zakat al-Fitr perfects the fast of Ramadan and purifies the fast of any indecent act or speech.

In its external form then, *Zakat* is an annual tax. But in essence, it is the principle on which God and his creatures have a right to a share in one's property.

The Ramadan Charity

Zakat al-Fitr is specifically related to the month of fasting and is given before the special Id prayer.

The reason for this *Zakat* is two-fold.

Ibn 'Abbas reported: The Prophet made *Zakat al-Fitr* obligatory for the fasting person to keep him from idle talk and indecent conversation and to provide food for the needy. Discharging the duty before the prayer is an accepted *Zakat* while discharging it after the prayer is just a sadqah.

Zakat al-Fitr perfects the fast of Ramadan and purifies the fast of any indecent act or speech.

It is obligatory on all Muslims: young, old, male and female. Every Muslim who possesses over and above what is needed as basic food for the duration of one day and night must pay *Zakat al-Fitr,* approximately 3 kg of dates or barley or wheat or its equivalent value in money. It is preferable to give foodstuffs. It is usually the head of the household who collects the *Zakat al-Fitr* for himself and his dependants and distributes it.

It is used to help the poor and needy. The earlier it is given the easier it is for them to make arrangements, so that they may also take part in the celebrations of Id without any difficulties.

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Zakat
The Prescribed Charity

The Prescribed Charity

The fourth pillar of Islam, *Zakat*, is the giving of alms out of one's own private means at a minimum fixed rate of 2.5% per annum. This money is given in the name of God and is to be spent on worthy religious causes and on meeting the needs of the poor and the helpless.

Zakat is in the nature of an annual reminder to man that everything he possesses belongs to God, and that nothing should, therefore, he withheld from Him.

Man himself plays only a very small part in obtaining whatever he owns in this world. Were he not to have the benefit of God's endless bounty, he would neither be able to grow grain, raise cattle, set up industries not accomplish any other work of a useful nature. The system of life created for him by God, meeting as it does all of his requirements from those of his inner being to those of his external environment, is one of the greatest perfection. Were God to withdraw even a single one of His blessings, all man's schemes would lie in ruins and all his efforts would be in vain. All productivity would grind to a halt, and life itself would come to a standstill.

Zakat is in the nature of an annual reminder to man that everything he possesses belongs to God.

The observance of *Zakat* is a way of acknowledging this fact of life. Islam desires that private wealth should be considered as belonging to God, and that He should have his rightful share in whatever gains are made.

One's Responsibilities to Others

In so doing, no one should consider that he is conferring a great favour upon those less well-endowed than himself, and should in no way be condescending to the recipients of his charity. When a man gives alms to others, he should do so in the knowledge that they have a rightful share in his wealth, for this is as God has ordained. He is doing no more than give others their due. But when he gives, he can feel reassured that he himself will be given succour by his Maker on the Day of Judgement. In giving to others, he knows for certain that he will not be denied by God at the Last Reckoning.

Zakat gives a clear indication of what one's responsibilities to others should be.

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Zakat gives a clear indication of what one's responsibilities to others should be. Everyone is required to recognize the rights of others, just as everyone is expected to sympathize with those afflicted by adversity. This feeling should be so well developed that one has no hesitancy about sharing one's possessions with others, or coming to their assistance, even when it is clear that nothing can be expected in return. Even where there are no ties of friend-ship, one should wish others well and guard their honour as if it were one's own.

Society should be so ordered that the fortunately placed in life come to the assistance of their less fortunate brothers.

Gifts from God

Zakat brings the realization that all of one's possessions are gifts from God and makes one more keenly aware of the virtues of devotion to God. In the light of such awareness, one cannot remain insensitive to the needs of the society in which one lives. *Zakat* is a perennial reminder that a selfish stance is a wrong stance, and that others must be given their rightful share of our earnings.

One unfortunate aspect of human relationships is that people tend to give to others only when they hope to gain something in return. Money, they feel, should be returned with interest. When such an understanding becomes a factor in our social organization, exploitation becomes ram-pant; everyone is ready to plunder everyone else. This results in society falling a pray to oppression and disorder.

In its external form then, *Zakat* is an annual tax. But in essence, it is the principle on which God and his creatures have a right to a share in one's property.

No one— whether rich or poor — can be at peace in a society stricken with this malaise.